

Louisiana Senator Bill Cassidy: Our Maternal Death Rates Are Only Bad If You Count Black Women

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5-6 minutes

As conservatives across the country [wage war](#) on reproductive rights, demanding by law that women be forced to carry any pregnancy to term, regardless of the circumstances, they frequently (slash always) like to forget that they do absolutely nothing to support these people during said pregnancies or after. Mississippi, for example, where abortion will immediately [become illegal](#) if *Roe v. Wade* is overturned, has the highest rate of [child poverty](#) in the country and recently [rejected](#) a bid to extend postpartum Medicaid coverage. And in Louisiana, which has a similar trigger law that will [go into effect](#) upon *Roe* being reversed, maternal mortality rates are among the worst in the nation. But according to GOP senator **Bill Cassidy**, the rate at which women die during pregnancy or shortly after is not as bad as it seems—if you subtract the deaths of Black women, which apparently don’t count.

In an interview with Politico, the following words [came out](#) of Cassidy’s mouth: “About a third of our population is African American; African Americans have a higher incidence of maternal mortality. So, if you correct our population for race, we’re not as much of an outlier as it’d otherwise appear. Now, I say that not to minimize the issue but to focus the issue as to where it would be. For whatever reason, people of color have a higher incidence of maternal mortality.”

There’s a lot to unpack here. Let’s start with the idea that Cassidy—who wants to [defund Planned Parenthood](#) is all, *Yes, on its face, our maternal mortality rates are abysmal, but if you only count white women, they’re not that bad!* Then there’s the phrase “for whatever reason.” In fact, there is one very big reason in particular— perhaps you can take a guess? “It’s no mystery why maternal mortality rates are so high among Black women,” **Michelle Williams**, the dean of Harvard’s School of Public Health [said](#) in response. “They are high because of the devastating impacts of structural racism and individual bias.” As Politico notes, Black mothers are [three times more likely](#) to die from a pregnancy-related cause than white mothers in the U.S., which has the worst mortality rate among developed nations and where “17 mothers die for every 100,000 pregnancies in the country.” In Louisiana, Black mothers are [four times as likely](#) to die than white mothers.

Asked what how *Roe v. Wade* being overturned would affect maternal mortality rates, Cassidy dismissed the question. “If we’re using abortion to limit maternal deaths, that’s kind of an odd way to approach the problem,” he said. That, of course, is total bullshit. As NBC News [reported](#) earlier this month, “Research suggests the bans and restrictions would have manifold effects on maternal health. For one, if more pregnant people can’t get the abortions they seek, they’d shoulder the risk of the U.S.’s relatively high—and rising—rate of death from pregnancy-related causes, which is particularly elevated among people of color.” As Dr. **Amy Addante**, an ob-gyn in Illinois, bluntly put it: “There are going to be women

that will die from pregnancy because of this decision, period.”

And in other war-on-women [news](#), via HuffPost:

Donald Trump’s pick for a Michigan state Senate seat is promising to ban all birth control if she gets the chance. “I guess we have to ask ourselves, would that ever come to a vote in the Michigan state legislature? And if it should, I would have to side with it should not be legal,” Republican **Jacky Eubanks** said in a recent interview with [the site Church Militant](#). “People believe that birth control—it’s better, like you said, oh, because then you won’t get pregnant and you won’t need to have an abortion,” she added. “But I think it gives people the false sense of security that they can have consequence-free sex, and that’s not true and that’s not correct. Sex ought to be between one man and one woman in the confines of marriage.”

While Eubanks’s comments are completely disturbing, she’s far from the only Republican who’s suggested they want to see contraceptives banned. In March, Senator **Marsha Blackburn** [called](#) *Griswold v. Connecticut*—the 1965 ruling that struck down a state ban on contraceptives—“constitutionally unsound,” while [Idaho plans](#) to hold a hearing to ban emergency contraception and potentially IUDs as well. Others have claimed that anyone worried about a ban on birth control (or gay marriage, or interracial marriage) is being hysterical—which, incidentally, is what many said about the prospect of *Roe* being overturned.